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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the organization and function of the Instructional Improvement Committee (IIC) system developed by the Jefferson County (Alabama) School System. Each school in the system has its own IIC, chaired by the school principal; the principal arranges for the election of at least one representative each from the various groups within the school family, including students, parents, teachers, classified employees, and community leaders. The IIC serves as a clearinghouse and sounding board for concerns related to the school and advises the principal on various educational needs, interests, and problems. Because citizens are actively involved in the school system's management plan through participation on IICs, there is little need for separate "citizens' committees." (JG)

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Remarks
by

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"HOW TO GET FULL VALUE FROM CITIZENS' COMMITTEES"

Clinic C-41
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SUMMARY

I have said:

1. Citizen participation should be a sub-system of the school system's management plan, rather than a tack-on to the Board.

2. There is probably little need for pure citizen committees separate from others in the "school family." This would apply to other groups also--teachers, students, classified personnel, or parents.

3. Participation of all groups as just delineated is educative in nature.

4. The expertise claimed for separate citizens committees can be obtained by requesting volunteer citizen consultants to serve established committees.

5. The highest priority for citizen participation on school system committees is to get a handle on the school system operation in an advisory sense.

6. The second highest priority for citizen participation on school system committees is to have a handle on and be an active participant in the system management information system (MIS) or data flow; i.e., information.

7. The major goal of citizen participation in the school system is to bring credibility to the recommendations of the Board employee and to provide verification of the delivery system. For example:

   A. In the classroom students are learning.

   B. Additional instructional materials are needed.

   C. Capital outlay in the learning area needs to be improved.

   D. Enough textbooks are delivered but not on the student's reading level--these advisors cut red tape.

8. In other words, in our present society when what you do rather than your handshake, or your word, is your bond, let's provide for direct confirmation or documentation of our performance.

9. To have committees which have a handle on school system's operations rather than just those studying and report to the Board; the Board of Education must support an open communications policy for all, with and to anyone at any time.

"HOW TO GET FULL VALUE FROM CITIZENS' COMMITTEES"
(Direct participation of citizens with other concerned members of the school family)

INTRODUCTION

The improvement of education is a goal shared by thousands of people throughout this county and our Jefferson County School System. They are students, parents, teachers, school administrators, non-teaching or classified school personnel, and community leaders--all members of the Jefferson County Board of Education's school family. The Board realizes that the ideas, concerns, and support of each of these groups are necessary to achieve that common goal.

Therefore, in order to tap these valuable resources the Board has provided for the establishment of two broad-based advisory committees in each JefCoEd school: The instructional improvement committee (IIC) and a budget sub-committee. Together they provide for a program of participation unique to education in Alabama.

We have had these advisory committees in operation for two and one-half years. I shall attempt to briefly explain the purposes, composition, and procedures for these two committees.

The Jefferson County Board of Education has enlarged the committee concept to include a Board Committee system in the courthouse. There are four committees--Personnel, Business Management, Support Services, and Systems Management, one representing each division of the school system and its membership is composed of two board members (one serving as chairperson) and a division superintendent. The concept is expanding from the school base to the classroom through an IIC advisory committee which consists of a discipline and/or grade department committee, and, eventually, an individual teacher advisory committee of which the teacher is executive secretary.

PURPOSE

The major purposes of the IIC (Instructional Improvement Committee) are to provide a clearing house for ideas and a sounding board for concerns which relate to teaching and learning in the school.

The committee's membership serves to advise the principal on the needs, interests, and problems as seen through the perspectives of all members of the school family.

The IIC is not a decision-making group. The principal of each school remains the chief executive officer with the legal responsibility to make decisions which will affect the lives of everyone involved with a school's operation.

The additional information provided through the membership of the IIC provides principals with a better base of information upon which to make those vital decisions.

The major purpose of the advisory boards at the central staff level (courthouse) is established as an administrative communication link between the IIC in each school and the Jefferson County Board of Education committees and the Board. It shall be a function of the advisory boards to assist the board of education committees in solving problems that relate to the local schools. The concept of the advisory board is a learning-management process which incorporates a problem solving approach using written procedures and supporting rationale. The procedures serve as a vehicle for transmitting formal and informal input and feedback in a two-way communication flow.

The primary purpose of the discipline and grade or department level advisory committee is to provide a clearinghouse for ideas, problems, and a sounding board for concerns which relate to the teaching and learning at a grade or department level. The IIC advisory committee membership serves to advise the principal and IIC on the needs, interests, and problems as seen through the perspective of all members of the school family.

The department or grade level advisory committee is not a decision-making committee. Its primary function is to generate data which relates to the needs of the students and school family of this grade or department level which serves as a broader base of information upon which vital decisions are made.

MEMBERSHIP

The most important aspect of any working, representative group is its membership. A design for broad representation is a major strength of the IIC.

The committee's chairperson at each school is the principal, who makes arrangement for the election of at least one representative of each of the following groups within the school family: students, parents, teachers, classified employees, and community leaders. Therefore, each IIC has a minimum of six members, including the principal. Six members are required in order for the school's IIC to be valid and recognized by the Board.

The principal may enlarge the committee by appointing other representatives on such bases as grade levels, academic disciplines, extra-curriculum activities, and support or organizations.

Membership is voluntary. Efforts should be made, however, to insure that clearly recognizable representative of all special interest groups are included.

The membership of the advisory board has the same composition as the IIC with the addition of certificated and classified representation from the central office level. Each school group shall elect, by secret ballot, one person to serve on the schools' IIC committee and to be that school's representative from the system-wide advisory board, with the exception of the citizen group representative which is appointed by the principal following nominations from the various organizations in the community.

This advisory group is designed for school family representation within the discipline and grade or department level. The group would have a minimum of five members; the group chairperson, one parent (elected by parents of students from whom the chairperson is responsible), one citizen at large (no students in school), one student from classes for which the chairperson has responsibility, and one peer teacher (elected by the teachers with whom the teacher works).

MEETING SCHEDULE

The instructional improvement committee is designed to meet monthly, or weekly until agenda items have been exhausted, during the regular school year. Together the principal and the appointed membership determine the most convenient meeting time and place. The meeting times should not conflict with the school's instructional program. Copies of the committee's meeting schedule should be widely disseminated throughout the school and the community and should be posted in the school's office.

At least once each quarter, the IIC and the budget sub-committee hold joint meetings. This is considered in establishing the meeting schedules of both.

The advisory boards shall meet monthly at times regularly schedule in advance of the board of education's divisional sub-committee meetings for the purpose of reviewing action by the board of education at its previous meeting and to prepare any information the advisory boards wish to present to the divisional board sub-committees, and to observe and report on the regular meeting of the board of education.

The discipline and grade or department level IIC advisory committee meeting time is designed not to interfere with the instructional program nor the IIC and budget sub-committee. The advisory committee shall meet at least once monthly preceding the regular IIC meeting.

OPERATION

Each committee meeting is conducted from an agenda established by the principal, who presides at each meeting. Roberts Rules of Order are used.

Any problem or proposal relating to the school's operation may constitute an agenda item. Any member of the school family may request, through the principal or a member of the committee, that a particular concern be placed on the agenda for consideration of the committee membership. The order of the agenda items is determined by the committee.

Agenda items might relate directly or indirectly to the school's curriculum and instruction, facilities, furniture and equipment usage, materials and supplies, discipline, textbooks, maintenance, transportation, extra-curriculum activities, classroom activities, food service, library service, scheduling, school rules and regulations, etc. Individual pupil and/or employee personnel matters are off limits, but all parties have direct access to the immediate supervisor for grievances, hearings, and appeals.

All requests for problems or suggestions to be discussed by the IIC must come in writing, defining the issue, stating who and what is involved, offering alternative solutions, and recommending particular solutions. A form to facilitate this procedure, "The JefCoEd Problem Solver," is used to place items on the agenda and for appealing decisions to immediate supervisors.

The chairperson (the principal) of the IIC, utilizing the information on the problem solver, leads a discussion of the problem and/or proposal, and the group identifies alternatives and/or solutions, and then attempts to select the best solution--a majority vote as needed is used to advise the principal. The conclusion reached by the IIC is utilized by the principal in making his final decision, which is forwarded on a copy of the JefCoEd problem solver to the person submitting the initial problem. If the person does not accept the decision, he may appeal to the next higher line officer, the form indicating to whom the appeal is made.

The principal may appoint sub-committees of the IIC to study certain issues, such as academics, safety, sanitation, and discipline, in greater depth and report findings back to the committee's full membership.

Minutes are recorded at each meeting. Following the meeting written copies of the minutes are to be posted in the school office and distributed to the members of the committee and to others interested.

The advisory boards shall plan and conduct in-service training sessions for the benefit of all members to acquaint them with the operation of the school system.

Agenda items for the board educational committees and/or board are developed from local school and central staff requests or concerns relating to the operation of the schools which mayrelate directly or indirectly to the full range of instructional or support services. The order of the agenda items for the board committees are determined by the board committee secretary (superintendent of division) and the agenda for the board of education is prepared by the secretary of the board (superintendent of schools).

Any member of the advisory boards, when recognized by the board committee chairperson or president of the board of education, may speak on any issue or problem but does not have any official voting privileges.

Minutes are recorded at each board committee meeting and will be made available to the advisory boards for distribution to their membership and to others as applicable.

The agenda is established by the chairperson who presides at each meeting using the Roberts Rules of Order. It shall be the function of the discipline and grade or department level IIC and budget advisory committee to assist the chairperson in solving problems that relate to the teachers and students. This concept of the IIC advisory committee is a learning-management process which incorporates the problem-solving approach in relating planning with the budgeting aspect of classroom instruction.

APPEALS

As was outlined earlier, the IIC is not a decision-making body. Its purpose is to advise the principal on decisions that need to be made and to serve as a major source of information. The principal, with this background, makes all decisions governing the operation of the school. Those decisions, however, need not be final.

Any member of the school family--student, teacher, parent, classified employee, or citizen--whether or not a member of the IIC, may appeal decisions of the principal.

The procedure for appeals follows the school system's organization of management through one of the four JefCoEd divisions, their Board of Education committees, and finally the full membership of the Board.

An individual may determine when to appeal a decision and is free to select the division through which the appeal will be initiated. For example, a personnel problem submitted by a teacher may be forwarded through the personnel office, or through the line or administrative office. A student may present his problem to his teacher, the principal, or the appropriate staff person. A by-pass system is permitted when the individual's problem is related to his immediate supervisor.

The advisory boards and the Jefferson County Board of Education committees are not a decision-making body. Their purpose is to advise the superintendent and board on decisions that need to be made and to serve as a major source of information and review. The recommendations are not final in that additional questions and information may be presented when a board committee item is presented to the board of education. The board committees analyses are available information from

the representatives of the school families (including central staff certificated and classified). Any member of the school family, whether or not a member of the IIC or advisory boards may appeal recommendations to any member of the advisory board or line organization.

Recommendations made by the IIC advisory committee would serve as the major source for information to the principal in making decisions governing the operations of the school. However, any recommendation made by this committee and/or decisions made by the principal as a result of the recommendations may be appealed by members of this family group. Appeals may be made to the department chairperson, elected members, or principal.

BUDGET SUB-COMMITTEE

As with any family, money is a major concern of JefCoEd's school family. Where the money comes from, how much comes, and for what it is spent are issues of great importance to all those involved in or affected by the operation of the local school.

With this realization in mind, the Jefferson County Board of Education has provided for the creation in each of JefCoEd's eighty-six schools of a budget sub-committee to the IIC as a part of the fifteen(15) months' program budget cycle for the school system.

It has much in common with the parent instructional improvement committee. Their composition is based on the same formula; they both meet monthly and work from prepared agendas; both follow essentially the same operational and appeals procedures, and both serve to advise the principal. As assistant principal may serve as the budget sub-committee chairperson.

The budget committee is responsible for studying and for advising the principal on all sources of school funds, for establishing the school's yearly budget, for reviewing monthly the school's actual income and expenditures, and for modifying the budget as needed.

Wise utilization of money is a primary concern of the JefCoEd school family and Board of Education. The establishment of a fifteen-months' program budget planning cycle was developed as a model to be used as a guide for more explicit planning, and for providing a means whereby issues of great importance to all could be reviewed fully prior to making decisions which result in the allocation of funds.

The local school budgets are constructed by the principal after reviewing recommendations which are prioritized and submitted by the IIC and budget sub-committee relating to the specific school needs. The compilation of the local school budgets and the divisional budgets provide a tentative budget plan at the central office level and are reviewed by the Board educational committees. The data provided through advisory process for utilizing input of the IIC, budget sub-committees, and the division board committees, contribute to the data base necessary for long and short range educational planning at the Board level.

The fifteen-months' program budget cycle enhances the decision-making process at the Board level by compiling information on a timely basis. Program budgeting requires participatory planning from the total school family, and, therefore, the committee concept is a viable component of the fifteen-months' program budget planning cycle and management information system. The committee concept, when used effectively, serves as a process for utilizing input for budget planning, in addition to serving as a medium for venting concerns.

- The discipline and grade or department level IIC advisory committee is a basic component in the model used with developing the planning aspect for building a program budget. Goals, needs assessments, and the costing of activities shall be initiated and reviewed at the department or discipline and grade or department level.